



# Character in Action: Living the Army Ethic Every Day



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This article will explain:

- **The ethics advantage: How character strengths drive Soldier success**
- **How to put your character strengths into action to live ethically**
- **Life grounded in values: How strengths of character fuel ethical action**
- **The strength of the U.S. Army lies not just in its equipment but in the character of its Soldiers.**

Guided by the Army Ethic—a moral framework rooted in justice, accountability and honor—Soldiers earn public trust and uphold shared values. This Ethic is the foundation of mission success and moral legitimacy.

### Character strengths fuel ethical action.

[Character strengths](#) turn moral intentions into behavior, as in courage driving truthfulness when the stakes are high. When Soldiers align with their strengths, ethical choices become second nature, strengthening resilience, cohesion and commitment to honorable service.

### Knowing who you are at your best empowers you to live the Army Ethic every day.

Recognizing personal character strengths, such as those defined by the [VIA Institute](#), allows a Soldier to live according to the Army Ethic. The VIA classification identifies 24 universal character strengths across six virtues: wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance and transcendence. These character traits are the pathways by which ethical principles are lived.

- **Wisdom** (creativity, curiosity, judgment, love of learning, perspective) helps Soldiers to think critically, seek knowledge and offer rational counsel in complex situations.
- **Courage** (bravery, perseverance, honesty, zest) enables Soldiers to stand for what's right, persist in missions, ensure truthfulness and serve selflessly.
- **Humanity** (love, kindness, social intelligence) fosters empathy and compassion, which are the foundation of ethical behaviors.
- **Justice** (fairness, leadership, teamwork) [promotes fair treatment](#), inspires shared goals and strengthens unit loyalty.
- **Temperance** (forgiveness, humility, prudence, self-regulation) allows Soldiers to make sound decisions and to keep their composure under pressure.
- **Transcendence** (appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratitude, hope, humor, spirituality) connects Soldiers to a life with meaning and [optimism](#) and gives them a purpose beyond themselves.



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Ethics and character strengths are deeply connected and work together to guide meaningful action in daily life. Consider this:

**Ethics provides the “what”**—that is, the moral guidelines, principles and values that tell us what’s right, good and just. These are often abstract ideals, like honesty, fairness and responsibility.

**Character strengths provide the “how”**—meaning the practical, internal capabilities that enable us to live out ethical principles. The VIA Institute defines these strengths as “values in action” because they are the concrete ways in which we show our virtues and ethics.

You can take action by understanding this connection:

1. **Identify your signature strengths:** There are several ways to discover your top character strengths, including through assessments like the [VIA Survey](#). Knowing who you are at your best is empowering.
2. **See how your strengths enable ethical behavior:** We often know what is ethical, but acting on this knowledge can be hard. Your character strengths help bridge the gap. Once you know your strengths, you can consciously use them to act ethically.
  - **Got courage?** If bravery, perseverance, honesty and zest are your strengths, you can use them to stand up for what’s right, to push through tough ethical challenges, to be truthful and to bring energy to serving others.
  - **Strong in justice?** If fairness, [leadership and teamwork](#) resonate with you, use these attributes to treat everyone equitably, to guide others toward shared ethical goals and to collaborate.
  - **Good at temperance?** Strengths like prudence and self-regulation help you make sound, well-informed decisions and maintain composure under pressure, ensuring that your actions will be ethical even in tough circumstances.
  - **High in humanity?** If love, kindness and social intelligence are your strong suits, lean in to them to foster empathy and compassion, which are fundamental to ethical interactions.
3. **Cultivate your moral identity:** The more you intentionally use your strengths to act ethically, the more natural and intrinsic [ethical behavior](#) becomes. This builds a sense of yourself as an ethical person.
4. **Promote flourishing:** By consciously using your character strengths for good, you contribute to your own well-being and the well-being of those around you, creating a more positive and just environment.

Identifying and using your character strengths are about more than personal growth—taking these steps will allow you to live out your ethical principles daily in ways that benefit those around you.



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## References and Resources

Leveraging Your Character Strengths to Live a Life of Meaning

<https://www.armyresilience.army.mil/ard/R2/Character-Strengths.html>

Develop Your Character Strengths in Three Phases

[https://www.armyresilience.army.mil/ard/r2/develop\\_character\\_strengths.html](https://www.armyresilience.army.mil/ard/r2/develop_character_strengths.html)

How to Cultivate Character

<https://www.ausa.org/articles/how-cultivate-character>

Developing Leaders of Character: It /s Our Job

<https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/Military-Review/Online-Exclusive/2023-OLE/Developing-Leaders-of-Character>

Developing the Character of Army Professionals

<https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/NCO-Journal/Archives/2018/August/Developing-Character>

Owning Our Army Ethic

<https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/Military-Review/English-Edition-Archives/2010-Archive/Fromm-2010-Army-Ethos>

Reflections on Leading, Values, & Beliefs

<https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/NCO-Journal/Archives/2021/March/Reflections-on-Leading-Values-Beliefs>

Use Signature Strengths to Be Your Best Self

<https://www.hprc-online.org/mental-fitness/performance-psychology/use-signature-strengths-be-your-best-self>

Who Are You At Your Best?

<https://www.hprc-online.org/mental-fitness/performance-psychology/who-are-you-your-best>

The VIA Character Strengths Survey

<https://www.viacharacter.org/account/register>